

RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES: AN EXPLORATORY AND DESCRIPTIVE
STUDY OF INCOMPLETE INSTITUTIONALIZATION
AS A PERCEIVED PROBLEM

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Sandra K. Thoman

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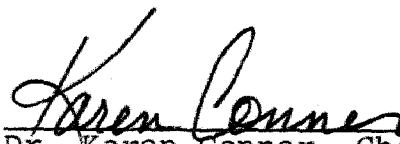
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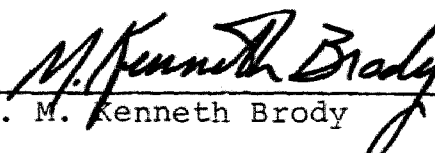
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An abstract of a Thesis by
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August 1982
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The problem. The question explored in this study is whether the problems of reconstituted families are influenced by a perceived lack of institutionalized support networks available in American society.

Procedure. This thesis quantitatively analyzed data formulated from questionnaires and interviews with a sample obtained using the snowball technique.

Findings. Generally, findings of previous similar studies were substantiated in terms of identifying the uniqueness of the reconstituted family from the original family. The reconstituted family is an entity quite different in dynamics from the original family of first time marrieds. Persons entering reconstituted families, however, have unrealistic expectations that the norms which have been developed for original families will guide them in the development of the new family unit. Most persons identified role confusion once in their new situation. Subjects identified a need for more education about the unique aspects of reconstituted families and increased awareness of problems to be anticipated before they actually entered the situation. They believed this could be facilitated through organized religion, the media, formal education, or premarital family counseling. Many subjects also acknowledged their perceptions of creating the norms for persons in reconstituted families, rather than following developed norms.

Conclusions. In the dialectic between the individual and society, individuals are currently creating the roles and norms which society can then institutionalize. Such societal institutionalization of the reconstituted family can provide guidance and support for its future members.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The family is one of society's basic social institutions and, as such, has been analyzed and studied for some time. Fairly recently the nature and structure of the family have undergone dramatic changes; with these changes, the functions of the family have changed also. No longer is the family unit tied to economic pursuits; protective functions are given over to police, social welfare programs, physicians, military, etc.; school systems run by government or religious agencies increasingly perform much of the socialization and education of children; recreation has become commercialized; and the mass media play a very significant role in forming moral and cultural values.¹ With these changes have occurred alterations in the roles and values of the individuals who make up families.

Some contend there has been a change from the work ethic to a hedonistic ethic. Christopher Lasch called the seventies the "Age of Narcissism" where emphasis was placed

¹G. R. Leslie, The Family in Social Context (2d ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 233-235.

on enjoyment, self-fulfillment, and personal growth. Narcissism appears to be the best way of coping with the anxieties of modern life and the prevailing social conditions bring out the narcissistic traits present in each of us. The sense of historical discontinuity has fallen on the family.¹ Both males and females are redefining their roles within and outside of the family structure. No longer is membership in a marriage seen as necessary for fulfillment; persons are placing more emphasis on what is right for them rather than living under societal restrictions.² Corresponding with this is an attitude change concerning divorce.

The divorce rate began a steady climb after the late 1950's and has doubled in the past decade.³ The number of children, particularly minor children, affected by divorce doubled between 1950 and 1965.⁴ Four out of five divorced

¹C. Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (New York: Norton Publishing, 1978), p. 50.

²J. Z. Giele, Women and the Future (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan Publishing, 1978), pp. 139-163.

³S. L. Albrecht, "Correlates of Marital Happiness Among the Remarried," Journal of Marriage and the Family, 41 (1979), 857.

⁴A. Plateris, Children of Divorced Couples, National Center for Health Statistics, Series 21, No. 28 (February 1970), p. 1, in J. Bernard, Remarriage (New York: Russell & Russell, 1971), preface.

persons remarry--75 percent of the females and 84 percent of the males.¹ This implies that there is today a larger proportion of reconstituted families; families which consist of the remarried divorced persons and the children which each partner may bring from the previous marriage to the new family. Sixty percent of remarriages involve an adult with physical custody of one or more children. Today one million children and a half million adults become members of new stepfamilies each year.²

The traditional family of husband and wife united in a first marriage with children now accounts for only 45 percent of American families. Fifteen percent are single-parent families; 15 percent are husband and wife without children. The remaining 25 percent include the remarried divorced or widowed persons and their children (the reconstituted family) and all other family types.³ For reconstituted families, there is a probability of divorce significantly greater even than for persons in original

¹Albrecht, p. 858.

²E. Visher and J. Visher, Step-families: A Guide to Working with Stepparents and Stepchildren (New York: Brunner/Mazel Publishing, 1979), p. xviii.

³A. Schorr and P. Moen, "The Single Parent and Public Policy," Social Policy, 9 (1979), 15.

families.¹ In 1950, 75.2 percent of marriages in Iowa were first time married for husband and wife--8.5 percent involved second marriages for both husband and wife. In that same year 57.1 percent of divorces were first marriages for husband and wife while 13.2 percent were for twice married husbands and wives.² Visher reports that 40 percent of second marriages end in divorce within four years.³

It has been speculated that this increased probability of divorce for the remarried may be due to pathology of the partners, continued poor communication techniques, less hesitancy to divorce a second time, or to unique problems of persons in reconstituted families, such as children and other ties to the original family.⁴ Additionally, many of the problems which may be specific to reconstituted families may be related to unclear role expectations, at least in part.

¹P. Landis, "Sequential Marriage," Journal of Home Economics, 42 (October 1950), 626; J. McCarthy, "Comparison of the Probability of Dissolution of First and Second Marriages," Demography, 15 (1978), 355; T. P. Monahan, "How Stable are Remarriages?" American Journal of Sociology, 58 (November 1952), 287.

²Monahan, "How Stable are Remarriages?" p. 286.

³Visher and Visher, p. xix.

⁴Bernard, pp. 185, 284-290; A. Cherlin, "Remarriage as an Incomplete Institution," American Journal of Sociology, 84 (1978), 640-646; Monahan, "How Stable are Remarriages?" p. 280.

Previous studies of reconstituted families have focused on the problematic relationships between and among stepchildren and stepparents. Loyalties to previous family ties can cause problems in the reconstituted family units and may result in feelings of alienation for family members. It may be that such problems are causally related to the increased probability of divorce in these families as the spouses involved discover they are unable to cope with the difficulties associated with combining two previously separate family units. There is a paucity of norms developed for the guidance of members of the reconstituted family. This means that such families are not fully institutionalized in our society.

Institutionalization occurs when some segment of human activity becomes controlled and regulated by society and where expectations are clearly understood by all members of the society, even if they are not followed by all.¹ The lack of institutionalization for reconstituted families may be related to problems experienced in these families.² Therefore, the question addressed in this study is whether the problems of reconstituted families are influenced by a

¹P. Berger and T. Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1966), pp. 54-55.

²Cherlin, pp. 634-636.

perceived lack of clarity or development of institutionalized support networks available in our society for husbands and wives in reconstituted families.

CHAPTER TWO

Statement of Purpose and Review of the Literature

This study is meant to be exploratory and descriptive in nature. Its purpose is to offer some understanding of how husbands and wives in the reconstituted family perceive their situation, what is the influence of society on them, and how they interact in our society to help create their social norms. The family is one of society's basic institutions, but there exist many different types of families in our society today. Marital and family reality may be quite different for the traditional family of the first-time husband and wife and their children than it is for families composed of remarried spouses with children.

Society institutions arise when some segment of human behavior or activity becomes controlled by society. Habitualized behaviors (roles) are devised. Expected behaviors arise from the interactions of the members of the society and become folk knowledge. New generations are taught to accept these behaviors during their early socialization.¹

In relation to the family, this means that society has

¹Leslie, p. 5.

devised habitualized patterns of behavior for each member of the family which are accepted as typical by all members of the society.¹ These are sometimes enforced by laws and often reinforced by morals and religious values, educational systems, and the mass media. Habitualization carries with it the psychological gain that choices are narrowed so that family members face fewer decisions which will cause disagreements.² Currently, the norms and values associated with the family institution reflect the more traditional approach to family structure, adults in a first marriage with children. It is possible that each variation of the family in our society may not conform to the institutionalized patterns to the same degree. Norms do exist for original families even though they seem to be in the process of change to more equalitarian patterns as sex roles change. But for reconstituted families, the normative framework may not be so clearly defined, if it is defined at all.

Norms have been developed which tell parents how to socialize their children. Major functions of the family are to provide for socially approved reproduction and to provide family members with guidelines for proper behavior in everyday life.³ Parents are expected to provide for the

¹Berger and Luckman, p. 54.

²Ibid., p. 53.

³Cherlin, p. 634.

physical and mental well-being of their children, for example, and the children are to respect their parents and to obey them within socially acceptable parameters.

Institutionalized patterns of behavior are given little conscious attention by original families, and are merely a part of the habitualized or typical and routine actions of families.¹ In the original family, children learn how family life should be by what they are told and by observing the role models of their mothers and fathers and significant others. As children are added to the unit of husband and wife, unity develops slowly and without conscious deliberation. Children are socialized gradually. Changes must be made to adjust for the developmental stages of the family unit, but they usually occur without undue effort such that the persons in the original family grow to become a cohesive primary group. There may be differences and competition within a primary group, but disharmony is tempered with sympathy, feelings of alliance, and common goals. There is a sense of "we."²

Primary groups form the social nature of individuals so that they may live within a society in relative harmony. Yet, the reconstituted family does not automatically become

¹Cherlin, p. 636.

²L. Duberman, The Reconstituted Family: A Study of Married Couples and Their Children (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishing, 1975), pp. 3-8.

a primary group, and may have difficulty in ever achieving "primariness" or a sense of "we." There is less sense of individuals having combined to form one unit, a family sharing, trusting, and caring for one another. The couple in the reconstituted family must deal with children immediately--their own and/or those of the new spouse. There is no chance for the relationships to develop slowly.¹ Children may feel left out as their natural parent must also relate to stepchildren.

While stepfamilies cannot be patterned after the traditional nuclear family, this is what many reconstituted families attempt to do. There is a myth of instant adjustment--the belief that things will fall into place. Most people are unable or unwilling to identify in advance the issues they must face in remarriage. There is also a myth that stepparents and stepchildren will form a family unit similar to that composed of biological children and their biological parents.² Women commonly believe it is up to them to make up for the original divorce and must create a new close-knit happy family. They also believe they must be a living example that the wicked stepmother is a myth.

¹J. R. Earle, "Parental Conflict in First Marriages and Remarriages as Reported by Sample of Adolescents," Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1961, p. 42.

²D. S. Jacobson, "Stepfamilies: Myths and Realities," Social Work, 24 (1979), 203-204.

They believe that they must love their stepchildren instantly and equally to their natural children and also must receive the love of their stepchildren. Fathers may try to be heroes or "Santa Claus" fathers to their own children, lavishing them with indulgences and gifts to make up for their physical absence. Many also feel guilt about parenting another's children when unable to parent their own. Discipline is an area which frequently causes the first real difficulties. Children may feel they do not have to mind a stepparent.¹ Agreement and support between spouses becomes essential.

The fact that members of two previously separate original families take up a common residence following a ceremony of marriage to form a reconstituted family does little to weld the two families into one. Instead, old ways of life are continued, and conscious effort must be made to avoid conflict.² However, the reconstituted family after divorce and remarriage must develop into a primary group if they are to live peacefully and productively in their own home and in society. Further, all actors in the reconstituted family must attempt this transformation to a primary group simultaneously.³ Thus, the reconstituted

¹Visher and Visher, pp. 50, 93-100, 123.

²Leslie, p. 645.

³Duberman, p. 6.

family faces both more and different problems than original families.

Anticipatory socialization teaches the norms of a role performance before the individual is placed in a social situation where it is appropriate to actually perform or function in that role. Such socialization allows for ease of role transitions. We might assume that there is adequate anticipatory socialization of persons to afford relatively easy transition into new roles which are present in formation of new original family groups.¹ But this is not necessarily the case for persons filling roles in reconstituted families. There are as yet few social norms developed to aid in learning the behaviors necessary to cope with such problems as the reconstituted family must face.²

American attitudes toward remarriage are complicated by negative stereotypes of stepparents.³ Kinship terms such as stepmother, stepchild, etc., have negative connotations derived from folk tales and historical experience. According to Berger and Luckman, it is this folk knowledge which forms the basis or foundation for the primary

¹W. Burr, Theory Construction and Sociology of the Family (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), p. 125.

²Cherlin, pp. 642-646.

³Leslie, p. 635; W. Smith, "The Stepchild," American Sociological Review, 10 (1945), 237; Visser and Visser, p. 6.

knowledge about the institutional order and about the formation of roles.¹

The spouses in a remarriage have the advantage of age and experience, but the major problems of ties to former family relationships and of becoming a primary group are also present.² Bernard cites the former spouse's effect on a marriage, whether or not he/she actively intervenes.³ He/she is still a parent to the children, and there will be some degree of continued relationship with him/her. Even in those cases where there is no continued contact, "ghosts" can remain with the spouse in the reconstituted family who behaves in ways shaped by past relationships.⁴ The effect of the former spouse may be either favorable or detrimental.

Feelings of in-laws may also be influenced by previous marriages.⁵ Grandparents sometimes have difficulty accepting new spouses and/or the new grandchildren as "real" family members.⁶ Financial ties to former families, such as

¹Berger and Luckman, p. 65.

²Duberman, pp. 4-8; Leslie, p. 645; Bernard, pp. 272-290; Cherlin, pp. 638, 642.

³Bernard, p. 6.

⁴Visher and Visher, p. 35.

⁵Bernard, p. 197.

⁶Visher and Visher, p. 33.

alimony or child support payments, may present problems or cause resentment from children or adults.¹ Money takes on emotional overtones.² New spouses may resent the amount of money going to the children or spouse of the former marriage, or there may be competition involving whether new family or old family is the recipient of more financial support.

Children from previous marriages constitute another major problem area for reconstituted families, perhaps the major problem. Some of the related problems of integrating families include self-consciousness of adults and children, embarrassment of maintaining a relationship with the living biological parent who is the same sex as the stepparent, the question of adoption, rivalry between stepparent and step-child, and competition between stepsiblings, and between parents and stepparents.³

The spouses in the new marriage may want to form a new family unit, but the goal of the children may be to prevent that from happening. They may not promise to love, and may still harbor fantasies of the natural parents reconciling. They may feel that establishing a relationship with a step-parent is disloyal to either or both of their natural

¹Bernard, pp. 244-245.

²Visher and Visher, p. 34.

³Bernard, pp. 227-240.

parents. Children may also remain "pawns" in a struggle between natural parents. Many may fear being the "cause" of a second divorce and may build protective walls to avoid potential future losses.¹

Teenagers are faced with the task of preparing to leave home when they are at the same time asked to establish family cohesiveness in a newly formed group.² Stepsiblings may also compete for the love, financial support and time of the parents and stepparents, and may fight over space and territory in the new family. There may be competition over the seemingly small things such as holiday traditions etc.³ Dynamics will vary depending on the make-up of the individual reconstituted family. Block stated that in addition to the issues of first marriages such as love, sex, compatibility, and making a living, there are nuances of emotion, coping strategies and attitudes unique to reconstituted families. Volatile issues erupt out of a terminated marriage about to be reconstituted into a new union. Stepchildren, ex-mates, painful memories, and an extensive network of unfamiliar relationships represent a sizeable burden to even the most determined and optimistic. Most are cautious in making another commitment and are likely to be wiser than they were the first time. Yet, living with the

¹Visher and Visher, pp. 162-176.

²Ibid., pp. 176-177. ³Ibid., p. 214.

obligations and demands of remarriage may be more trying than they were able to predict.¹

Reconstituted families are difficult for Americans to categorize. Society does not know how to treat them.² There are no greeting cards for stepparents. Schools do not know how to act toward more than two parents.³ The family members themselves don't know what is required of them. It is not even clear who belongs in the family. For example, if a visiting stepchild is treated as a visitor, problems occur because s/he is not just a visitor. Yet if s/he is treated as a full member of the family, problems may also occur because s/he doesn't really qualify for that role either. Furthermore, behaviors in the relationships in reconstituted families will change from time to time because of unclear expectations and roles.⁴ Inner turmoil and unpredictable outward behavior can be generated. There is disorientation because there are few social guidelines beyond the negative images given by folk knowledge. Our society has not yet assigned status to the family of

¹J. Block, To Marry Again (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1979), pp. 9-10.

²Visher and Visher, pp. 223-224.

³Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁴Jacobson, p. 204; Visher and Visher, pp. 15-16.

remarriage with a model that recognized the differences in roles and functions between members of a first marriage family and members of a remarried family.¹ Also either absent or negative are religious attitudes or teachings regarding reconstituted families. Young stated that divorce is still often regarded as a personal sin.² Roles within the family structure have traditionally been seen as "God-given" and therefore as a sin if altered or ended. Remarriage could be seen as an exacerbation of that sin. Emerson wrote that remarriage laws of the churches are neither Christian nor humanitarian, but are emotional and dictatorial.³ Emerson continues that in Christianity, there are three basic stances. The Roman Catholic or Orthodox Catholic Church has no official recognition of divorce; hence no recognition of remarriage. Other churches do have a stated view: The Methodist position states "no minister shall solemnize the marriage of a divorced person whose husband or wife is living and unmarried unless adultery, mental or physical cruelty existed or unless they are being reunited with the previous spouse." Lutheran position is

¹L. Messinger, "Remarriage Between Divorced People with Children from Previous Marriages: A Proposal for Preparation for Remarriage," Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling, 2 (April 1976), 195.

²J. Young, "Divorce in Contemporary Church and Society," The Urban and Social Change Review, 10 (Winter 1977), 26.

³J. G. Emerson, Divorce, the Church, and Remarriage (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), pp. 14-15.

based on the circumstances of the case. There must be evidence of repentance for one's own responsibility in the failure of the marriage, and the person must have forgiven his partner in the former marriage. Presbyterian ministers must ascertain whether penitence for past failure is present and if there is a firm intention to make the new marriage succeed. The third position followed by the "free" churches such as Baptist or Congregational, allows any grounds for remarriage if approved by the head of the particular church. Young also stated that counseling of the divorced still operates from a sickness model, enhancing the stigma of divorce.¹ This stigma may be evidenced by the finding of Peters that religious association between the first and second marriage depreciated considerably.²

Cherlin stated that family law also makes no provisions for remarriage relationships such as defining financial obligations or even language symbols to be used when referring to the members within stepfamilies.³ Rights and duties are unclear. In fact, relationships between step-relatives usually last only as long as the marriage. For

¹Young, p. 27.

²J. Peters, "A Comparison of Mate Selection in Marriage in First and Second Marriages in a Sample of Remarried Divorced," Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 7 (1976), 489.

³Cherlin, p. 644.

persons who have been shown already that marriages do end, this must add to the reluctance to form new trusting intimate relationships.

Walker et al. say the reconstituted family is an extremely complex institution.¹ Remarriage begins with a set of legal encumbrances resulting from divorce which decide custody, visitation rights, support payments, etc. There are more parent figures, grandparents and other kinships, all of which add to the complexity of relating within the family. The complexity of an institution itself is not a problem for its members if the society provides guidelines for typical roles and relationships. In the United States, however, societal guidelines in the form of legal and nonlegal norms and also the terminology appropriate to the reconstituted family are lacking.

Habitualized or even typified behavior is absent. The members of the reconstituted family seem to be in a constant process of trial and error. No matter how skillful the stepparent, success is not likely because social norms make it impossible for the stepparent to completely take on the parent role.² Bernard states that in families of remarriage, children and parents come to one another with

¹K. Walker, J. Rogers, and L. Messinger, "Remarriage After Divorce: A Review," Social Casework, 58 (1977), 276.

²Duberman, p. 48.

separate histories and therefore with different memories, conception of themselves, role definitions, expectations, and patterns of thought and emotion.¹

Jacobson stated that:

Each person, adult or child, who has been part of a previous family situation has a commitment to that previous family about which he or she may be ambivalent. Adults and children alike have experienced painful losses and approach their new situation psychologically hurt and wary. All are now concerned about being loved and respected in the new family. Their gratifications and problems are different from what they may have expected. Coping emotionally in this unfamiliar territory is hard work for everyone concerned.²

The sense of "we" which develops without deliberation in the original family does not occur so easily in the re-constituted family, precisely due to the past histories and ties of the family members. Bernard stated that by and large community attitudes are receptive toward remarriages.³ However, there is a lag between the traditional role conceptions and community attitudes and the presence of changed social conditions such as legal or religious codes of behavior which accounts for the confusion in our society today towards family life in general and towards the

¹Bernard, p. 211.

²Jacobson, p. 206.

³Bernard, p. 37.

reconstituted family specifically.¹ Rapid change in one part of the culture requires corresponding adjustments from the other related parts of that culture. These are often made, however, only after a period of months, years, or decades.²

It may indeed be difficult to bring together specific members of two previously separate original families to form one new reconstituted family. Society has not fully institutionalized the reconstituted family, and this may make coping with the task of attaining "primariness" as a family unit problematic. Thomas stated "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."³ If reality is defined by individuals, and if what is perceived as real is acted upon as reality, then how the social situation of persons involved in the reconstituted family is perceived will define how they act upon this reality presented to them. It is this perception of reality which this study seeks to explore.

¹B. Yorborg, The Changing Family (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 23.

²Leslie, p. 232.

³W. Thomas and D. Thomas, The Child in America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), p. 571.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods and Methodology

Definition of Terms

The term original family, for purposes of this study, means the husband and wife who are united in a marriage which is the first marriage for both and the children resulting from that marriage, whether adopted or biological.

Reconstituted family is operationalized as the members of the family which consists of husband and wife where both have been married once before the present marriage, and where either or both have brought children from the first marriage into the second marriage whether or not such children are living full time in their household. No childless couples were included in the study; it was believed that the addition of children to a marriage so changes the dynamics of the group that families with and without children would constitute two separate populations.

Institutionalized support networks is defined for this study as the cultural norms of our society pertaining to family life. They include the mores and laws which regulate and define the roles of family members. Examples of such laws would be economic support obligations in the

family, incest or marriage restrictions between step-children and parents, etc. Cultural norms include such things as folk knowledge (that which "everybody knows"), portrayal of family life by the mass media and literature, etc. Religious norms entail the teachings of the various churches regarding family life.

Sample and Procedures

The empirical phase of this study was conducted in Polk County, Iowa, between May 1 and June 7, 1982. Data were formulated from responses to written questionnaires and oral interviews. The questionnaires combined open-ended and closed-ended questions and were completed by the respondents in the author's presence. Responses were coded and processed statistically. Interview questions were open-ended and responses were content analyzed for statistical description.

The questionnaire used in the study was devised by the researcher after talking with known persons in reconstituted families and completion of a literature review. It was then tested in a small pilot study and revised on the basis of that study. A copy of the questionnaire and interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

A subsample of seven questionnaires was coded separately by a fellow graduate student and compared with the author's coding to establish inter-coder reliability.

Closed-ended questions had a reliability of 98 percent, while open-ended questions were coded with 88 percent reliability. Inter-coder reliability for the interview questions was 95 percent on a subsample of three. Combined inter-coder reliability for questionnaires and interviews was 94 percent. When there was disagreement the author's original coding was used.

Persons selected for this study were: persons who are currently in a second marriage, where at least one spouse brought children to the second marriage from the first marriage, whether or not the children resided full time in their home; or persons who have been divorced twice and who had children from first marriages brought to the second marriage by either husband or wife, whether or not those children resided full time in their home.

The sample was obtained using the snowball technique.¹ The first layer of the sample used in this study consisted of six persons (two couples and two individuals) known by this author. At the end of the initial interviews with those persons, each was asked to name others who fit the criteria that were used in the study. Four additional names were obtained from these six, each of whom participated.

¹Because of laws protecting the privacy of individuals, it was not possible to obtain a sampling frame of persons issued marriage licenses, nor was it possible to obtain membership lists from groups such as "Parents Without Partners" or "Married Again."

At this level, only one name was received; this person refused to participate. To obtain additional potential contacts, four acquaintances of the author were asked to name persons fitting study criteria who could be contacted. This yielded ten more names (five couples and five individuals). Two of the individuals failed to be present at the arranged interview times. Two couples did not meet study criteria so could not be included in the analysis of data. From this group of ten, two more possible contacts were named (both couples); all four individuals did participate.

The final sample consisted of twenty-three persons, fourteen of whom were married or had been married to other respondents (seven couples and nine individuals whose spouses did not participate). Nineteen of the twenty-three respondents consented to the taped interview in addition to completing the written questionnaire. Four respondents requested that their spouses not be contacted for participation and/or did not want the spouses to be aware of their own participation. Three of the seven couples interviewed are currently divorced from their second marriage and one respondent is currently separated.

Subjects were contacted initially by telephone. The study was explained, as were the author's credentials. Referral sources were identified, and an appointment was made to meet with the subjects in their homes or offices at times which were convenient for them. All subjects were

assured of confidentiality and were informed that results of the study could be found in the Drake Library.

It is recognized that the snowball sampling technique used in this study does not provide a random sample. It does, however, provide a look at persons who are concerned enough to give their time to express their feelings and perceptions. It is not known how these persons might differ from persons in reconstituted families who would choose not to participate in such a study.

Development of Theory

Anticipatory socialization prepares persons for roles which they have not yet filled. In that the family is one of the basic social institutions, society has developed norms for behaviors and attitudes which are to be expected of persons in the various positions in the family. Many of these norms are learned as people grow up and are socialized in the society. Although society includes a large number of reconstituted families, there is little, if any, anticipatory socialization to help persons ease into the roles of the reconstituted family. Such families are not part of the institutionalized concept of family at this time, although this process does seem to be beginning.

Because there are no norms specifically developed for persons in the reconstituted family, it is hypothesized that there will be problems perceived by persons in those families as they try to perform in ways and in situations

which are uncharted territory. Members must learn by trial and error. Thus, the questions to be addressed in this study are: (1) whether there is a perceived lack of institutionalized norms provided by society for persons in the reconstituted family, and (2) if this lack is perceived to be related to the problems which the reconstituted family faces.

The specific areas to be explored are relationships between perceived problems and (1) the lack of legally specified responsibilities and rights in reconstituted families; (2) the image of reconstituted families presented by the mass media (TV, movies, newspapers, books, and magazines); (3) information given by the educational system; (4) the religious teachings and attitudes towards family life; and (5) the attitudes and support of family and significant others.

After an extensive literature search, the author discovered no empirical studies which examined the relationships between the number and kinds of norms perceived by the members of reconstituted families and the number and kind of problems experienced by those members. This, then, is an exploratory and descriptive study. The purpose of this endeavor is to generate information which can be used in future studies to generate and test hypotheses. As social creatures, we are formed by and at the same time also form our society. The relationship between the

individual and society as it relates to the family, particularly the reconstituted family, deserves further exploration.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of Data

Description of Sample

The sample includes fifteen females and eight males. The mean age at the time of the study was forty-eight years for males, and thirty-nine years for females. The mean age at the time of respondents' first marriages was twenty-one years. The mean duration for the first marriage of this sample was nine years ranging from two to twenty-one years. The mean was fourteen years for males as compared with seven years for females.

Mean age at the time of the second marriage is forty for males and thirty-two for females. The mean duration of the number of years in the second marriage for this sample is seven with the range of the duration of the second marriage from three to twenty years. Two divorced couples were married for six years; a third divorced couple was married seven years before the second divorce. One respondent, now separated, has been married for nine years.

These figures compare to the national median ages at the time of first marriages of 20.4 for females and 22.9 for males. Duration of first marriages is roughly seven years and duration for second marriages is eight years

according to 1975 census data. Remarriage median ages are twenty-nine for females and thirty-two for males.¹

Seven respondents have earned master's or doctorate degrees; four are college graduates; nine have had some college; three are high school graduates and none have less than a high school education. Thirteen persons are "professionals" based on being college graduates or more and/or working in a field requiring licensure; this group included six RN's; three counselors or therapists, two physicians, one college professor and one corporate executive officer. Five respondents are white collar, again based on type of employment and amount of education. These include a bookkeeper, secretary, two social workers (without master's degrees) and one bank employee. Five subjects are blue collar with no college degrees and are employed as a dance instructor, homemaker, construction laborer, electrician, and bartender.

Religious preferences are eighteen Protestants, three Catholics and two "others"--one Unitarian, one atheist. Five persons have had a significant change from their background religiosity to their present religiosity. Four persons attend their churches weekly; four more than monthly;

¹U.S. Bureau of Census Series P-20, No. 297, Number, Timing and Duration of Marriages and Divorces in U.S., June 1975, in P. C. Glick and A. Norton, "Marrying, Divorcing, and Living Together in the U.S. Today," Population Bulletin, 32 (October 1977), 8.

two attend less than monthly; seven attend several times yearly (including the atheist respondent who attends with spouse); five are religious but do not attend church; and one is "nonreligious" and does not attend church but considers spiritual life to be important.

Introduction to Data Formulation

In the analysis of data to follow, responses will be given both in terms of actual numbers responding in each category and the percentages of the total number of respondents for each question. Totals will often be greater than 100 percent because subjects were free to respond to more than one category for most questions or to write in as many responses as they desired.

Data Related to Marriage

Tables 1, 2, and 3 depict responses of the twenty persons who answered and prioritized the first question.

Table 1 shows that the majority of persons identified value differences and "other" as the problems which they prioritized in first, second, or third position in their first marriage. "Value differences" were not defined or elaborated on, so one can only speculate what these might have been. "Other" as the most important problem includes infidelity for one person; chemical dependency for six (one in self and five in the spouse) and personal growth which caused increasing emotional separation between the spouses

for one respondent. Number two priority includes one respondent who listed psychological problems in the spouse, one cited communication difficulties, and one cited personal growth. In number three priority, "other" consisted of spouse's temper and psychological problems of the spouse. During informal conversation with respondents, it was learned that "chemical dependencies" included excessive and abusive use of alcohol or drugs which interfered with the cohesiveness of the husband/wife relationship. "Personal growth" was defined as emotional or psychological changes that were perceived which increased the perceived emotional distance between partners in the marriage--"growing apart." It was not explored whether the "growth" or use of chemicals caused problems in the marriage or resulted from problems existing in the marriage already.

Respondents were also asked to prioritize the major problems in their second marriage. Table 2 depicts those responses.

The "other" category in Table 2's number one priority consists of chemical dependency, temper of spouse, communication problems, relationships with an ex-spouse, and inequality in the new relationship with spouse(one each). In the number two priority, one each mentions communication problems, relationships with an ex-spouse and lack of commitment to new marriage from one of the spouses.

Table 1
Three Major Problems Identified in First Marriages
N=20

Problems: Categories	Major Prob.		#2 Prob.		#3 Prob.	
	No. of Subjects	%	No. of Subjects	%	No. of Subjects	%
Finances	1	5	4	20	2	10
Children	1	5	0	0	1	5
Sexual Relations	1	5	1	5	0	0
In-laws	0	0	0	0	0	0
Religion	0	0	0	0	0	0
Value Differences	7	35	3	15	0	0
Division of Responsibilities	0	0	2	10	3	15
Other	10	50	3	15	2	10

Of the seven persons who deny significant problems in the second marriage, four had no minor children involved in the second marriage. One couple (two persons) has children together, but only one spouse has children who were brought to the current marriage from a previous one. The remaining person is in a marriage where only one spouse had children from a first marriage. Seven of the eight persons who rate children as the most significant problem in their second marriage are in reconstituted families where children were brought to the second marriage from the first by both spouses. The eighth has no children from her first marriage,

but is coping with problems with her stepchildren.

There are fewer problems due to value differences cited in second marriages. This may indicate that this was an area which was better explored by the respondents before the second marriage commitment was made or that they have become more tolerant in the second marriage.

Table 2

Three Major Problems Identified in Second Marriages
N=23

Problems: Categories	Major Prob.		#2 Prob.		#3 Prob.	
	No. of Subjects	%	No. of Subjects	%	No. of Subjects	%
Finances	1	4	3	13	4	17
Children	8	35	1	4	2	9
Sexual Relations	0	0	0	0	2	9
In-laws	0	0	0	0	0	0
Religion	0	0	0	0	0	0
Value Differences	2	9	3	13	0	0
Division of Responsibilities	0	0	3	13	1	4
Other	5	22	3	13	0	0
None	7	30				

Table 3 summarizes the total number of respondents who list the various categories in the first, second, or third priorities. This is based on all twenty-three respondents for first and second marriages--those not prioritizing and

not counted in Tables 1 and 2 did not list more than three problems, thus could be counted here.

Table 3

Total Percentage of Problems in First, Second, or
Third Priority for First and Second Marriages
N=23

	First Marriage	Second Marriage
Children	9%	48%
Finances	30	35
Value Differences	43	22
Sexual Problems	9	9
Division of Responsibilities	22	17
In-laws; Religion	4	4
Other	65	35

Respondents were asked how their ideas about marriage changed subsequent to the first marriage. Six persons or 26 percent reported no change. Sixteen persons (70 percent) cite changes including "marriage should be based on more friendship, understanding, and sharing; having clearer expectations; a desire to enjoy life more; more commitment to try harder to achieve success; an attitude change to desiring a more equal and respectful relationship; changed attitudes about the opposite sex generally; and learning to have less emphasis on work and personal goals." One person

did not respond. Table 4 lists numbers and percentages of persons responding in each category. Again totals do not equal the number of respondents due to multiple listings.

Table 4
Changes in Ideas About Marriage After First Divorce
N=23

	Number of Subjects	Percentage of Total
Marriage based more on friendship, sharing	2	9%
Clearer expectations	6	26
Desire to enjoy life more	2	9
More commitment	4	17
More equality desired	3	13
Change attitude about opposite sex	1	4
Less emphasis work and personal goals	1	4
No change	6	26
No response	1	4

As to the sources of ideas about how a spouse should behave, Table 5 lists respondents' answers. The majority of persons believe that parents, friends, religion, and education or the media were influential in forming ideas about how a spouse should be expected to behave.

Table 5
Sources of Ideas About Spouse Behaviors
N=23

Source	Number of Subjects	Percentage
Own parents	16	70%
Friends, etc.	14	61
Religion	15	65
Laws	5	22
Education or media	12	52
Other	1	4

Six persons (26 percent) reported no change in their beliefs after the first marriage. Two (9 percent) believe in less romance and more friendship; two (9 percent) expect more work to be involved in maintaining a relationship; five (22 percent) desire less traditional roles and more equality; one (4 percent) has changed attitudes about what to expect from the opposite sex; one desires more openness in communication from a spouse; three (13 percent) have different (undefined) expectations of a spouse; and eight (35 percent) believe more compromise to be necessary.

Seventeen (74 percent) of the entire sample report that their second marriage is/was much better than their first marriage, including four of the seven persons now separated or divorced. Five more persons (22 percent) describe the

second marriage as "somewhat better" including two more of the divorced group. Only one person rated the second marriage as somewhat worse; this person is also now divorced. No one rated the second marriage as much worse. This is a significant finding. Ninety-six percent reported an improvement in the second marriage when compared to the first. This may indicate increased tolerance, better choice of spouse, or may reflect the expectation that second marriages should be better due to the learning experience of the first.

When questioned about the attitudes of families toward their first divorce, two (10 percent) report that their families had strongly approved of the first divorce; six (29 percent) more had families which approved; eight (38 percent) had families who were neutral or expressed no opinion; three (14 percent) had families who disapproved; and two (10 percent) had families who strongly disapproved. Two persons were widowed, so this question did not apply. Only five persons (24 percent) believe that their families' opinion has had any effect on their second marriage. One person said his family did not accept his new wife (this person is now twice divorced); four persons said the approval from the family about the first divorce has enhanced the second marriage relationship.

Questions nine and ten asked about the "rules" of the second marriage. Six (26 percent) formed rules based on

what did not work in the first marriage. One (4 percent) cited the media as influential in rule determination; four (17 percent) listed formal education and texts; three (13 percent) listed religious teachings; sixteen (70 percent) listed "other" including: general experience in life (for two respondents), family (two respondents), trial and error (four respondents), communication between spouses about expectations and goals (three respondents); took over the jobs of housekeeper (one respondent); equality--"whatever you may do, I may do"--(one respondent); needed decisions about "rules" were not made (one respondent); no response (one respondent); followed spouse's rules (one respondent). Ten (43 percent) report agreement between the spouses about the rules. Twelve (52 percent) report some areas of disagreement, and one is uncertain. The areas of disagreement are listed in Table 6.

Table 6
Rule Disagreement Between Spouses

Areas of Disagreement	Number of Respondents
How to solve problems; communication; who decides	3
Finances; where and when to spend	2
Children	7
Ex-family relations	2
Religion	1
Duties of household	1
Relations with family and friends	1
Importance of husband/wife relationship above relationships with children	1

Data Related to Children in the
Reconstituted Family

The next section of data analysis concerns questions asked about the children in the family. Twenty persons (87 percent) in this sample have children from a previous marriage. Nineteen (83 percent) have spouses who had children from a first marriage. Sixteen (70 percent) are in reconstituted families where both spouses have children from first marriages. Five (22 percent) have children from the second marriage. Of those five with children from the second marriage, four said that there are problems; two report jealousies between "ours" and "his/hers"; two did not

identify the specific problems. Eighteen (79 percent) report that stepchildren present problems in the second marriage. Two persons did not reply to this question. The following percentages are figured based on these eighteen subjects who report problems. The most frequently mentioned problem is lack of discipline from one spouse or disagreement about how to discipline "yours, mine or ours" from seven persons (39 percent). The next most frequently mentioned problem is two different sets of rules for the two sets of kids, his and hers (five persons, 27 percent). Four (22 percent) report feelings of alienation from the stepchildren and/or spouse. Three each (17 percent) report behavior problems from one or more children and different feelings shown for and from stepchildren as compared with their own children in amount of love shown, time spent together, and other problems. Two persons each (11 percent) report anger directed at the stepparent from the stepchild, manipulation from the children, and hostilities and jealousies between and among the children or spouses. Five (22 percent) report no problems with stepchildren: four of these are in situations where only one spouse has children from a previous marriage. The other person has children who were nearly grown when the second marriage occurred.

One of the six persons who reported no problems in the second marriage in question two, did report problems with

stepchildren in this question.

Thirteen respondents (56 percent) report differences between the spouses about how to behave toward stepchildren. Nine (39 percent) report agreement and one had no response. Table 7 lists the mentioned differences between spouses.

Table 7
Differences Between Spouses About Behavior
Toward Stepchildren
N=13

Differences	Number	Percentage of Respondents
Discipline	5	38
Behaviors expected from children	5	38
Amount of love, kindness, etc., to be felt and shown	3	23
Favoritism shown toward children	2	15
Handling jealousy	1	8
Verbal agreement only, not in practice (non-specific)	1	8

Table 8 depicts responses as to how ideas about step-parents' behavior toward their stepchildren and how children's behavior toward stepparents was developed.

Table 8

Origination of Ideas About Stepparent/Parent-Child Relating

Origination of Ideas	Behavior of:		
	Stepchildren Toward Stepparents N=19	Natural Children Toward Parents N=20	Stepparent Toward Stepchildren N=19
Religious teachings	4 (21%)	9 (45%)	4 (21%)
Legal guidelines	1 (5%)	0	0
Advice family or friends	8 (42%)	10 (50%)	6 (32%)
Information media, school, etc.	7 (37%)	10 (50%)	4 (21%)
As own children acted in first experience as parent	14 (74%)	N/A*	N/A*
Like parent-child relationships in family of origin	11 (58%)	17 (85%)	12 (63%)
Other	3 (16%)	5 (25%)	8 (42%)

*Not applicable

Twice the number of respondents mention religious teachings playing a role in ideas about natural parent/child relationships than in ideas about stepparent-stepchild relationships. It is interesting to note that 74 percent expect their stepchildren to behave toward them as their natural children do. Legal guidelines appear to be perceived as insignificant. Education and the media are mentioned by one-fourth to one-half of the respondents as forming ideas about step/parent-step/child relationships with more influence on natural parent/child relationships evident.

Of the twenty respondents who have or had stepchildren and children of their own either from the first or second marriages, three (15 percent) report no difference in how stepchildren behave toward them as compared to their own children. One respondent (5 percent) was uncertain due to the great age difference between "their" kids and "his" kids. Fourteen (70 percent) report that they are treated differently by their stepchildren than by their own children. Table 9 lists the differences which were identified.

Table 9

Differences Between Natural and Stepchildren
Behaviors Toward Step/parent
N=14

	Number	Percentage
Attitudes, feelings shown (love, etc.)	10	71
Levels of understanding of each other	1	7
Amount of respect shown	3	21
Openness of communication	4	29
Resentment of discipline	3	21
Manipulation from children	1	7

The three persons who report that stepchildren do not treat them differently from the way their natural children do also report that this is not a problem for them. This

would seem to indicate that they like the fact that the stepchildren treat them as their own children do. In addition, three persons who did report that their stepchildren do treat them differently state that they do not find that to be a problem. Eleven respondents (79 percent) did, however, perceive that the difference in the way the stepchildren treat them is a problem for them: two feel undermined as a parent; three feel alienated from the stepchildren; four feel hurt with resultant strain on the marriage; one has experienced role confusion; and two report feelings of living as two separate families rather than one. This indicates that three-fourths of the respondents with natural and stepchildren are experiencing a problem because of differences in how stepchildren and natural children behave toward them.

Nineteen persons answered question twenty-one regarding problems among stepsiblings. Most of the persons in reconstituted families with children from the second marriage and where one spouse had children from a first marriage also responded to this question although those children could be considered half rather than stepsiblings. Eight respondents (42 percent) said there are no problems, one (5 percent) is unsure, and ten (53 percent) said yes, there are problems. This question is not applicable for four persons. Seven persons report jealousy among the children, one person cites sexual experimentation, three report

problems with privacy and sharing space, and one reports that different value systems between the two sets of kids causes problems.

Legal, Religious, Media Influences in Families

All twenty respondents who had children of their own report having legal responsibilities for them. Five persons (26 percent) of the nineteen who have stepchildren report having legal responsibility for stepchildren. One is uncertain if there are legal obligations for stepchildren and thirteen (68 percent) said there are no legal obligations for stepchildren. However, moral obligations are reported by eighteen (95 percent) of the nineteen persons who have/had stepchildren. Tables 10 and 11 list the legal and moral obligations identified.

Table 10

Number of Subjects Reporting Legal
Obligations for Kids

Type of Responsibility	<u>For Own Children</u>		<u>For Stepchildren</u>	
	Number	%	Number	%
Financial	11	55%	0	--
Health, dental	6	30	0	--
Basic needs	8	40	3	16%
Education	8	40	3	16
Love	2	10	1	5
Not abuse	2	10	--	--

Table 11
Number of Subjects Reporting Moral
Obligations for Stepchildren

Obligations Listed	Number Reporting	Percentage
Show affection, love	12	67%
Moral support	12	67
Treat fairly	12	67
Provide home, basic needs, financial support	4	22
Raise to be responsible adults	7	39
Teach right from wrong, religion	2	11
Protect; secure child's rights from natural parent	1	6

Twelve (52 percent) of the sample of twenty-three state that their church either approves or strongly approves of remarriage; three (13 percent) believe their church is neutral or has no attitude; five (22 percent) do not know their church's position; and three (13 percent) believe their church either disapproves or strongly disapproves of remarriage (two Catholics and one Protestant with a Catholic background). Twenty-one persons responded to the question of how the church's attitude affected the second marriage. Of these, fifteen (71 percent) said there was no effect, while six (29 percent) did identify an effect. Two report that their church's approval enhanced the second

marriage; three report feeling some stigma (two were Protestant, one Catholic--all report their church as having either unclear or disapproving attitudes about remarriage); and one Catholic reports her spouse had problems dealing with the church's negative attitude.

Twelve persons (52 percent) denied that the media had any effect on their beliefs about marriage. Twelve persons also expressed their belief that the media do not portray second marriages and family life realistically. Fifteen subjects (65 percent) feel media have little or no effect on the second family for them. Influences of the media which are cited included giving an unrealistic, idealistic view (four persons); giving a negative stereotype which children expect from stepparents; and causing the subject to use increased caution in the formation of a second family. Nine of the twelve persons who state that media do not portray reconstituted families realistically mention that there is a failure to depict the problems which might be expected; it all "works out too easily."

In response to the general open-ended last question, five persons state there are fewer problems in a second marriage. This group included an older couple married when the children were grown and where only one spouse had children, an under-thirty female married six years to a spouse who has no children from a previous marriage although she does, and an over-fifty male who married five

years ago when children of both spouses were grown. Five persons state there are more problems in reconstituted families because of children, but otherwise there are fewer problems. These persons consist of a female living with her spouse and child, but having difficulty with the spouse's child (both had teenagers when the couple married); another female is living with her spouse, children of second marriage, and some of her spouses children from a previous marriage (own children from previous marriage are living with their father); two respondents are a couple combining teenagers from both spouses in the same household; and the last is combining her early school age children with spouse's children ranging from the early through late teen years.

Three persons each mention a need for premarital family counseling to identify potential problems and issues and the need to work harder to make the marriage work. Two persons each list: dealing with "ghosts" from the first marriage, more concern about doing the "right" thing so that the marriage would not go "bad," difficulty in handling or knowing how to behave toward "visiting kids," working less hard in the second marriage due to less commitment to it, and the need to nurture the relationship of the spouses even more than in a first marriage.

Data from Interviews

The interview questions were answered by nineteen persons (three did not wish to be taped and one interview was accidentally lost when the author recorded over it). As before, totals may not equal the number of respondents due to multiple answers given. Table 12 depicts specific responses to how the first marriage prepared the subjects in this study for their second marriage.

Table 12
Preparation for Second Marriages by
First Marriages

Number	Preparation for Second Marriage by First
7	More understanding how to live with another; role expectations, sharing, coping with moods, etc.
3	Greater individual maturity gained in first marriage
4	Learned kind of person NOT to marry again
1	Learned more patience and time needed to solve problems
4	Different expectations of spouse

Twelve subjects (67 percent) believe that their first marriage did prepare them for the second marriage; three (17 percent) are unsure and three believe it did not. Of these three, one said that continued negative expectations of his spouse which were learned in the first marriage and

carried over to the second were detrimental in the second marriage; one said he was too immature and affected by chemical dependency to learn from the first marriage; and one was prepared not by the first marriage, but by living alone for several years.

Problems in the second marriage for which experience in the first marriage did not prepare these respondents included: blending families, especially children (six persons); dealing with a spouse who had different characteristics from a first spouse (three persons); the increased number of children (three persons); continued ties to first family, especially ex-spouses (three persons--all of these persons are now divorced); feelings of being isolated, left out of the family, or of remaining two separate families (three persons--two of which are separated or divorced now); guilts, hostilities, etc., about the end of the first marriage; and unclear role expectations related to the division of rights and responsibilities in the new family and agreement between spouses about those duties and rights (two persons--both now separated or divorced). Four persons admitted that ties had not been severed with former spouses; three had continued strong negative feeling and continued emotional needs to "take care of" or be "cared for" by the former spouse; one had no desire to cut ties and reported a good friendly relationship with the ex-spouse. (Three of these four persons are now divorced for

the second time). Nine persons stated that they had cut ties; seven of these remain in contact with ex-spouses only concerning the children of the first marriage.

Ten respondents report having found an effective method for relating with stepchildren; three say they have never been effective with stepchildren, and three say the answer is mixed, yes for some of the kids and no for others. This question was not applicable for three persons who participated in the interviews. All of the three who never achieved an effective way to relate to stepchildren are now divorced again; those who said their response was mixed consist of one married, one separated and one divorced. Among those with "yes" responses, one is divorced (the spouse in that marriage said she found no way to relate positively with stepchildren), and the others are all married.

Reasons given by those who have not achieved effective relationships with stepchildren include: no support from natural parents (four persons), unrealistic expectations (two persons), different beliefs between spouses about raising children (three persons), lack of communication with spouse (one person), and the children not being ready for any stepparent in their lives (two persons). Those who have achieved success attribute it to: open communication (four persons), not trying to replace the natural parent (four persons), no assumption of any kind of parental role--

acted as adult friend (four persons), treating all children equally (three persons), continued work (three persons), the children being grown when the second marriage occurred (three persons), having the support of the natural parent (three persons), the children's readiness to accept the stepparent (one person), slow evolution (one person), continued physical proximity (one person), mutual liking of personalities between parents and children (one person), and acting opposite of how her own stepparent acted toward her (one person).

Again, the four persons who denied having problems in the reconstituted family have not been faced with blending children from first marriages of both spouses. The other fifteen persons identify the following problems: acceptance of others different from self in terms of expressing feelings, etc. (two respondents), blending children (three respondents), children living long distances away (three respondents), attitudes of new spouses (five respondents), interference from ex-spouses (one respondent), lack of privacy (one respondent), lack of history together (two respondents), necessity of having to choose between loyalties to the new spouse or own children (two respondents), and stress from constant change of children coming and going from the household (two respondents).

In response to what could have made it easier to combine families, nine (47 percent) persons answered that

nothing could have helped. They believe that each family is different and must work out individual problems for itself. Four persons (21 percent) state that different attitudes about past ties would have helped and that problems in those past relationships should have been resolved before the second marriage. One individual said things would have been easier if the children had been either older or younger (this person was faced with a new marriage combining three school age and four teenage children, though not all living in the same household all of the time). Three mentioned that more information, education, and awareness about problems to be expected would have helped. Three also mentioned that mutual goals between the spouses would have helped (these last three are all divorced). Better communication skills or channels and having all of the kids together all of the time were each mentioned by two persons.

Two persons stated that society can do nothing to help reconstituted families. Eight believe that as the number of second marriages increases, living in them will become easier because the families will create ways to cope and will also become accepted. Three persons state that help is needed for understanding marriage and family life in general; more classes should be required in school, premarital counseling should be required, and divorce should be made less easy. Five specifically mention more education and

awareness of the problems to be expected or anticipated in reconstituted families, with the church and media designated as playing a role in the education process.

Five persons say a more realistic picture of the reconstituted family is needed with the media again designated to fulfill the task. Three persons believe that society must drop the negative images it holds about divorce, divorcees, and remarriages. Two persons mention the need to develop new norms and expectations. Two stress the need for premarital family counseling for at least several sessions before a second marriage and one individual stresses a need for support groups for persons in reconstituted families experiencing problems. One person believes there should be an enforced longer waiting period between marriages.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusions

The size of this sample is too small to generalize to a larger population or to statistically process with any significant validity, but it does serve a heuristic function. There are many similarities to findings of other studies as well as findings which point to future avenues of exploration. It appears that persons included in this study are generally similar to what has been found to be typical for persons in reconstituted families. Problems blending children, jealousies between children and parents, jealousies between stepparents and ex-spouses, and constant change of persons moving in and out of households were all mentioned by respondents in this study. Feelings of alienation and inability to achieve "primariness" were also described by many subjects.

Although this sample may well not constitute a fully representative depiction of the population of reconstituted families, the fact that the overall picture given by respondents in this study is similar to that described in the literature may indicate that the sample is at least somewhat representative of the population studied. The sample

used in this study is heavily weighted with middle-middle and upper-middle class persons. However, it may be that the problems which are specific for reconstituted families are independent of social class.

There is a noticeable difference between persons who are coping with blending children from two spouses and those who have children from just the previous marriage for one spouse, whether or not the reconstituted family has children from the second marriage union. This was brought out in the questions identifying problems in first and second marriages, the questions about agreement between spouses regarding relationships with stepchildren, and questions about the problems experienced in the reconstituted family. As was depicted in Table 3, two persons listed children as a problem in the first marriage as compared to eleven in the second marriage for the first, second, or third most significant problem. All other problems listed remained constant for this sample or decreased in the second from the first marriage.

Throughout the entire questionnaire and interviews, comments were made about unrealistic expectations which these respondents had for their second marriage families, though not for the marriage itself. Many seemed to anticipate that the family would operate similarly to how the first marriage family did in terms of the dynamics of how persons relate and how the family exists together. The

majority reported changing their ideas about marriage after the first one, and many stated having more realistic ideas about marriage. Almost all also reported that the second marriage was much better or somewhat better than the first marriage. Yet, it is interesting to note that seven identified more problems in the families, and all but one identified differences in original and reconstituted families and/or the kinds of problems encountered. As mentioned earlier, a few persons did find fewer problems but none of these were faced with combining two sets of children.

The majority of persons in this sample formed their beliefs of how their own children should behave in the family based on how children behaved in their own family of origin. The majority also formed opinions of how stepchildren should behave toward them as stepparents based on how children acted in their own families of origin and how their own children had acted toward them in their original family of their first marriage. It was identified as a problem for many that the way stepchildren behave differently from their own children toward them as parents is perceived as a problem. Based upon what the literature has stated, to expect stepchildren to behave as one's own children or as any children might be expected to do in original families appears to be a very unrealistic attitude for a stepparent to have. Dynamics are very different due to the bonding and loyalties to others not in the

reconstituted family and to lack of mutual history. This indicates that there is little anticipatory socialization for the roles of the reconstituted family.

In addition, a majority of respondents believe that they should act toward their stepchildren based on how parents and children related to one another in their families of origin, again not realistic for reconstituted families. Although a question was asked about problems between the stepsiblings, the author neglected to ask how those problems affected the family and the marriage, how they were handled, or if they had been anticipated before the marriage occurred. This would have been valuable information to obtain.

It is interesting to note that although a small majority of persons stated that the media had little influence on their beliefs about marriage and the family, and even more reported no influence on their beliefs about reconstituted families in particular (in question 28), about half reported receiving their ideas about how a spouse should behave from the educational system and the media. One-half of the sample also cited the media in formation of ideas about how natural children should behave toward parents. This percentage was much less for stepchildren and stepparents. These findings indicate that the educational system and media are perceived as more influential in the socialization for roles in original families than for those of reconstituted families.

Few people report religion influencing their reconstituted family. Yet a majority of the sample reports that religion played a role in forming their ideas about how a spouse should behave, and nearly half say it influenced beliefs about how their own children should behave. Only four persons report that attitudes about reconstituted families were influenced by religious teachings. This may indicate that religion has been less active in dealing with reconstituted families than it has been with providing guidelines for original families. It may be that divorced or remarried persons decrease their organized religious activity because of perceived stigmas attached to their status. Although half of this sample reported a perception of their church's favorable attitude toward remarriage, only one-third of the sample attends church more than monthly; less than half attends several times yearly, and the remainder does not attend church at all. It is unknown how this compares with church attendance of the general population or of first marrieds.

It would appear that legal obligations toward stepchildren are generally perceived as clear. About one quarter of the respondents report that there are legal responsibilities for their stepchildren as opposed to all who stated legal responsibilities for their own children. Whether correct or not in their assumptions of legal duty, respondents did not state perceived vagueness or ambiguity

of the law.

An interesting observation is that two of the persons who noted disagreement with their spouses about rules for the children were only slightly older (seven and eight years, respectively) than their oldest stepchildren. Another divorced female was only twelve years older than her oldest stepdaughter. Each of these respondents had believed that she should fill a parental role and each had experienced unanticipated problems in the children's reactions to that. Also interesting is that the three divorced couples all had male partners who were nine to eleven years older than the female partner. The separated individual is eight years older than her oldest stepchild, thus also probably having a spouse considerably older than she.

Each of the couples or individuals now divorced or separated mentioned disagreement not only about children, but also about role definitions, about loyalties to past family members, and about goals for the future. There were mentioned failures to develop adequate or positive relationships with the stepchildren, conflict about ex-spouses, lack of mutual goals and commitment between the spouses, lack of clearly defined roles and rules, unrealistic expectations, and little or no feeling of "we" or primariness. There may have been a lack of real bonding between these spouses which may have served to allow the pressures of the children and former experiences and ties to enhance an

already existing schism between the couple so that the marriage was abandoned. One of the divorced males specifically mentioned less commitment to the second marriage. It also appears that unresolved feelings about past ties (positive or negative) or the guilts around breaking those ties were significant for these couples. It was mentioned by two of the divorced or separated subjects that the new marriage afforded easily available scapegoats for problem relationships which existed between the members of the previous family.

It would appear that most persons in this sample directly or indirectly stated a perception of normlessness relating to participation in reconstituted families. Norms learned about and in original families no longer seemed to fit. There was resultant role confusion about how to act in their new situation where there were "two families in the same household," as two of the respondents termed their situation.

More counseling is seen as potentially helpful by several of the respondents. Premarital counseling is believed to be necessary as well as counseling and support for persons already in the problem situations of the reconstituted family. Many state the need for more awareness of the reality of the reconstituted family, so that persons can begin the marriage with a more realistic notion of what to expect. Several persons state that there is a need to

get rid of negative images and stereotypes which may no longer fit in today's society where divorces are more common. However, the negative image of the divorced person and the reconstituted family still seems to exist at least in the minds of some of the persons in those positions.

It is also interesting to note the number of people who express the belief that society will be changed by the people who are now, in ever increasing numbers, living in the reconstituted family and are establishing the new norms and roles for persons in such families. It is by studying and becoming aware of how these persons are defining and constructing their own reality that social scientists can aid society in the construction of a normative cultural order with habitualized behaviors, and thus more completely institutionalize the reconstituted family. Although almost half of the sample sees themselves as developing the norms for the reconstituted family, the other half perceives a need from society for guidance in defining behaviors. There is an inseparable dialectic between the two. Members of reconstituted families now and in the past have begun to form roles and norms based on their trial and error methods to find what works. Society can then give approval to those norms and institutionalize the reconstituted family. Habitualized behaviors can then be taught to the new members of the society so that there can be more ease of transition into those roles.

The social scientist plays an important role as "investigative reporter," formulating the data about the activities and behaviors of the "pioneers." It is then the obligation of the social scientist to share the data with other social institutions and society as a whole so that the new norms and roles created through the trial and error of the first members of the reconstituted families can be institutionalized by society.

Much information was obtained beyond that which is presented here. The informal conversations which occurred with most respondents following the interviews and the extra information supplied on the questionnaires and during the interviews provided a wealth of information. Many subjects seemed very interested in trying to provide a full picture of how they believed their situation to be. As an interviewer, I looked at pictures and listened to accounts of hurts, joys, laughter, and tears. I was introduced to and acquainted with "ghosts" and "exorcist rites" which had been performed. For some, the problems were still painful. It was brought out how important it is to have resolved hostilities or other emotional ties to former spouses prior to new marriages and to have resolved any sense of failure or guilt before new families are formed. I heard how people coped with past issues and how some failed to cope.

Many persons were unprepared for the extreme differences in the reconstituted family from what was anticipated.

several mentioned having read articles stating how much better second marriages were than first because of the experience and maturity of the spouses. They believe that such articles are harmful because they fail to identify all of the problems of the families which do not manifest themselves until after the marriage. The act of marriage changes the situation so that the relationships between sets of children and between the children and adults also change.

Subjects devoted one to two hours each to this project. The author found each person offered some valuable insight which was not quantified and thus not directly included in the study, but which the author will personally remember. Much more remains to be learned about the reconstituted family of second or even third, marriages. It remains to be seen how their members will cope over time or what lessons are learned in each marriage which may influence the next, and in what way.

It would be of interest to do case studies of persons who believe they have adjusted successfully to the problems encountered in reconstituted families and those who believe they have not. What are the actual differences in strategies used? What were the expectations? Were the problems different? Such questions could be explored on a homogeneous group of twice marrieds following divorce with both spouses having children from first marriages. Comparisons could

also be made controlling for variables such as age and residence of children, religion, age of spouses, etc.

One could also explore differences between second marriages with no children, reconstituted families where only husband had children from a first marriage, families with only the wife having children from a first marriage, families where one spouse has not been married before, families where both spouses have children from a previous marriage, and families where spouses are in third or subsequent marriages. It would also be interesting to learn how the environment of alternate homes of the children might affect the reconstituted family.

The perspective of the children is extremely important also. Because of the history of loyalties to children which existed before the relationship between the new spouses and because of the social norm which encourages ties between parents and their natural children, stepchildren in a reconstituted family may be in a very powerful position to influence the marital relationship, more so than in an original family. How do they use that power and what is its effect? How does it vary from family to family, and why? The variables are almost endless. Much additional research needs to be done to identify the variables before it can be determined how they relate to one another.

More specific and precise measurement tools need to be devised for use on larger randomized samples. Perhaps

sampling frames could be developed from newspaper reports of divorces granted. Since most persons remarry, after a period of a few years one could expect that most persons so identified would be in a new marriage. Other methods of finding persons meeting criteria could include placing ads in magazines or newspapers. Longitudinal studies of persons over time throughout a marriage and/or into a new marriage relationship could also be valuable.

As society changes with what seems to be increasing rapidity, so too will the family. Underlying this thesis and most family literature is the value assumption that divorce is undesirable or indicates personal failure. Perhaps, in today's society, this is not a realistic attitude. The social scientist may need to remove him/herself from that basic value as he/she continues to study the family in all its forms--and how the family influences and is influenced by society and the other social institutions.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part I
Questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed to help me understand what the differences and similarities between first and second marriage families are. Please answer questions based on the most problematic times during your second marriage.

Age _____

Sex _____

Current religion _____

Background religion _____

Amount of religious involvement (check one)

_____ attend church weekly or more

_____ attend more than monthly

_____ attend several times yearly

_____ do not attend but am religious

_____ am not religious

Age at first marriage _____

Number of years in first marriage _____

Age at second marriage _____

Occupation _____

Highest educational level (check one)

_____ less than high school

_____ high school graduate

_____ some college

_____ Master's or doctorate

1. What were the problem areas in your first marriage?
(Number in order of importance those that apply)

☐ finances
☐ children
☐ sexual relations
☐ in-laws
☐ religious beliefs
☐ value differences
☐ division of responsibilities
☐ other (specify) _____

2. What are/were the problem areas in your second marriage?
(Number in order of importance those that apply)

☐ finances
☐ children
☐ sexual relations
☐ in-laws
☐ religious beliefs
☐ value differences
☐ division of responsibilities
☐ other (specify) _____

3. How have your ideas about marriage changed from your
first to your second marriage, if at all?

4. Where did you get your ideas about how a spouse should
behave? (check all that apply)

☐ how own parents behaved
☐ how friends, etc., behaved in their marriages
☐ religious teachings
☐ legal responsibilities
☐ teachings at school, from books, television,
movies, etc.,
☐ other (specify) _____

5. How did those ideas about a spouse change after your first marriage, if at all? _____

6. How would you compare your second marriage with your first marriage? (check one)
 _____ much better
 _____ somewhat better
 _____ the same
 _____ somewhat worse
 _____ much worse
7. How did your family of origin feel about your first divorce? (check one)
 _____ strongly approved
 _____ approved
 _____ no opinion or neutral
 _____ disapproved
 _____ strongly disapproved
8. Does/did this affect your second marriage? _____
 If so, in what way? _____

9. How did you and your second spouse decide upon the rules for your marriage? (check all that apply)
 _____ based on what worked in first marriage
 _____ based on what did not work in first marriage
 _____ based on depictions by novels, TV movies, etc.
 _____ teachings of formal educational courses or texts
 _____ teachings of own religion
 _____ other (specify) _____

10. Do/did you and your second spouse agree on the "rules" for your marriage? _____ If not, how do you differ and in what areas? _____

11. Do you have children from your first marriage? _____
If yes, what are their current ages and sex? _____

Whom do they live with now (or when minors, if grown)? _____

What are/were the visitation arrangements with the non-custodial parent? _____

Is/was visitation a problem? _____ If so, in what way? _____

Does/did visitation cause a problem in your second marriage? _____

12. Does your second spouse have children from a first marriage? _____ If yes, what are their ages now and sex? _____

Whom do they live with now (or when minors, if grown)? _____

What are/were the visitation arrangements with the non-custodial parent? _____

Is/was visitation a problem in your second marriage or family? _____ If so, in what way? _____

13. Do you and your second spouse have children together? _____
_____ If yes, does/did this present problems in your family? _____ If so, in what way? _____

14. Do/did stepchildren cause a problem in your second marriage? _____ If so, in what way? _____

15. Do/did you and your second spouse agree on how to behave toward stepchildren? _____ If not, what are the differences? _____

16. How did you decide how you should behave toward your stepchildren? (check all that apply)

_____ religious teachings
 _____ legal guidelines
 _____ advice from friends or family
 _____ information from books, TV, movies, etc.
 _____ as you acted in your first role as parent
 _____ other (specify) _____

17. Where did you get your ideas about how your stepchildren should behave toward you? (check all that apply)

_____ religious teachings
 _____ legal guidelines
 _____ advice from family or friends
 _____ information from books, TV, movies, etc.
 _____ as your own children acted in your first experience as parent
 _____ as you treated your own parents as a child
 _____ other (specify) _____

18. Where did you get your ideas about how your own children should behave toward you as a parent? (check all that apply)

_____ religious teachings
 _____ based on how children acted in own family of origin
 _____ information from school, TV, books, movies, etc.
 _____ information from friends or family
 _____ legal guidelines
 _____ other (specify) _____

19. Do/did your own children behave differently toward you than your stepchildren do? _____ If so, in what way?

20. Is/was this a problem? _____ If so, how? _____

21. Are/were there problems which the stepsiblings have/had with each other? _____ If so, please describe.

22. Are there legal responsibilities toward your own children now or when they were minors, if grown? _____
If so, what are/were they? _____

23. Are there legal responsibilities toward your step-children now or when they were minors, if grown? _____
If yes, what are/were they? _____

24. Do/did you have moral obligations to your stepchildren? _____
_____ If so, what are they? _____

25. What is your church's attitude toward remarriage?
(check one)
_____ strongly approves
_____ approves
_____ neutral
_____ unclear or don't know
_____ disapproves
_____ strongly disapproves
26. Does that attitude influence your marriage? _____
If so, in what way? _____

27. Do TV, movies, etc., portray second marriages realistically? _____ If not, comment on how they are unrealistic. _____

28. How do/did media portrayals influence your beliefs about marriage and the family? _____

How do/did media portrayals influence what you expected in your second marriage family? _____

29. Feel free to add anything which will help me understand how second marriage families' problems are different from or the same as problems in first marriage families.

Part II

Interview Questions

1. Did your first marriage prepare you for your second marriage? If so, in what ways?
2. Are there any problems in your second marriage for which your experience in your first marriage did not prepare you? If so, what are those problems?
3. Have you been able to untie from your first marriage family? If so, how have you done that and to what degree?
4. Have you found an effective way to relate with step-children? If yes, what is that method and how did it happen? If no, what has prevented you from finding an effective way of relating with them?
5. What has been the biggest difficulty for uniting two separate families?
6. What could have made it easier for you to combine your families?
7. What could or should society do to make living in a second marriage family easier?